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Analytical Paper

Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada

The South Asian Community in Canada

2001

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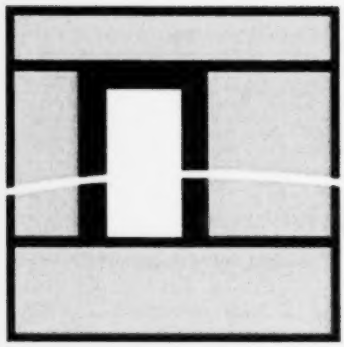

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p}	preliminary
^{r}	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E}	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

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Information on the series

This report was prepared by the Target Groups Project of Statistics Canada. This report is part of a series of profiles which will include profiles of the East Indian, Filipino, Haitian, Jamaican, Japanese, Korean, Lebanese and Vietnamese communities in Canada, as well as profiles of Canadians of African, Arab, Caribbean, Latin American, West Asian and Chinese origins.

Ordering print copies

To order print copies of this profile or any of the other profiles in this series, contact the Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage at 1-888-77MULTI (1-888-776-8584) or 819-953-1970. The report is also available free of charge on the Statistics Canada website at: http://www.statcan.ca

Questions or comments

For questions or comments about the content of this report, please contact Statistics Canada at 613-951-2603; fax 613-951-0387 or e-mail lindcol@statcan.ca.

Highlights

- Almost a million people of South Asian origin live in Canada, representing about 3% of the total Canadian population.

- 68% of Canadians of South Asian origin were born outside of Canada. Of these, 75% immigrated to Canada in the last twenty years.

- Canadians of South Asian origin make up 11% of Toronto's total population and 8% of that of Vancouver.

- 93% can carry on a conversation in one or both official languages, while only 7% cannot speak either English or French.

- 61% of adults of South Asian origin are married, compared with 50% all Canadian adults. In contrast, just 2% live common-law, compared with 10% of all Canadian adults.

- Only 4% of adults of South Asian origin live alone, compared with 13% of all adult Canadians. In the case of seniors, only 8% live alone, compared with 29% of all seniors in Canada.

- 25% of adults of South Asian origin have a university degree, compared with 15% of those in the overall population.

- 9.5% of labour force participants of South Asian origin are unemployed, compared with 7.4% of those in the overall population.

- The average income of Canadians of South Asian origin is $4,000 lower than the national average of $30,000.

- The incomes of women of South Asian origin are about 62% those of their male counterparts, the same figure as in the overall population.

- 28% of children of South Asian origin live in families with incomes below the low-income cut-offs, compared with 19% of all children in Canada.

- 70% of senior women of South Asian origin who live alone have incomes below the low-income cut-offs.

Introduction

This report describes the basic social and economic characteristics of people in the South Asian community in Canada. It is part of a series of profiles of the country's major non-European ethnic groups.

The information in this profile is taken mostly from the 2001 Census of Canada, the most recent source of census data. Statistics Canada conducts the Census every five years. One in five households receives a long questionnaire that asks household residents to indicate the ethnic or cultural groups to which their ancestors belonged. This profile is based on people who reported an ancestry that originates in South Asia, including those reporting their origin as at least one of Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Pakistani, Punjabi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil, or South Asian. The origin could be listed as the only ethnic or cultural group of their ancestors, or listed along with other ethnic and cultural groups.

This publication also uses information from the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), which was conducted in 2002 by Statistics Canada in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The EDS surveyed more than 42,000 Canadians over the age of 15. The objectives of the EDS were to understand more about how people's backgrounds affect their participation in Canadian society, economy and culture, and how Canadians from different ethnic backgrounds think about and describe their ethnicity.

Although the EDS and the Census provide very useful information, caution should be exercised in making direct comparisons between groups, particularly as they relate to causal implications, because the data have not been weighted to take into account differences in age and other factors.

This profile is based on the Census population, which includes the following groups:

- Canadian citizens (by birth or by naturalization) and landed immigrants with a usual place of residence in Canada (including those who are abroad, either on a military base or attached to a diplomatic mission; or who are at sea or in port aboard merchant vessels under Canadian registry).
- Persons with a usual place of residence in Canada who are claiming refugee status and members of their families living with them.
- Persons with a usual place of residence in Canada who hold:
    - a student authorization (student visa or student permit);
    - an employment authorization; or
    - a Minister's permit (including extensions);
    - and members of their families living with them.

For the purposes of this profile, the term "Canadians" includes all persons with a usual place of residence in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status.

The South Asian Community in Canada

A growing community

Canadians of South Asian origin[1] make up one of the largest non-European ethnic origin groups in Canada. In 2001, almost one million people of South Asian origin lived in Canada, representing about 3% of the total Canadian population.

Table 1
Selected ethnic groups in Canada, other than English, French and Canadian, 2001

	Total population	Multiple responses	Single responses	The total Canadian population
		thousands		percentage
Caribbean	503.8	180.2	323.6	1.7
Arab	348.0	109.4	238.6	1.2
African	294.7	110.0	184.7	1.0
Latin American	244.4	94.3	150.1	0.8
West Asian	205.0	47.8	157.1	0.7
South Asian	**963.2**	**160.9**	**802.3**	**3.2**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

The number of people in Canada of South Asian origin, as defined by Statistics Canada, is growing considerably faster than the overall population. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, the number of people who reported a South Asian origin rose by 33%, while the overall population grew by only 4%.

Canadians of South Asian origin include a number of different ethnic or cultural origins. In the 2001 Census, 74% said they were East Indian, while 8% were Pakistani, 6% were Sri Lankan, 5% were Punjabi, and 4% were Tamil.

The large majority of Canadians of South Asian roots reported only one ethnic origin. In 2001, 83% of all those who reported a South Asian ancestry reported only one ethnic origin, while 17% reported multiple ethnic origins. In contrast, about 40% of the overall Canadian population reported multiple ethnic roots.

The majority are foreign-born

A substantial majority of the population with South Asian origin living in Canada was born outside the country. In 2001, 68% of Canadians who reported a South Asian origin were born outside of Canada, compared with 18% of the overall population.

1. All statistical information in this publication referring to South Asian, Canadians of South Asian origin or people of South Asian origin denotes people who reported an ancestry that originates in South Asia in response to the question on ethnic origin in the 2001 Census or 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey.

The majority of immigrants of South Asian origin arrived in Canada relatively recently. In 2001, 53% of immigrants of South Asian origin had arrived in the previous decade, while another 22% came to Canada between 1981 and 1990. In contrast, only 5% had arrived in the 1960s, while less than 1% had come to Canada before 1961.

Most live in two provinces

The large majority of the Canadian population of South Asian origin is concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia. In 2001, Ontario was home to 62% of all Canadians of South Asian origin, while another 22% lived in British Columbia. At the same time, 8% lived in Alberta and 6% lived in Quebec. Overall, almost 600,000 people of South Asian origin lived in Ontario that year, while 210,000 lived in British Columbia, 72,000 lived in Alberta and 63,000 were Quebec residents.

People of South Asian origin also account for relatively large shares of the populations in both Ontario and British Columbia. In 2001, Canadians of South Asian origin represented just over 5% of the populations of both Ontario and British Columbia, while they represented over 2% of Alberta residents, and close to 1% of the total populations of Quebec, Manitoba and the Yukon.

Table 2
The South Asian population in Canada, by province and territory, 2001

	Total South Asian population	The provincial/territorial population	The total South Asian population in Canada
	thousands		percentage
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.1	0.2	0.1
Prince Edward Island	0.1	0.1	0.0
Nova Scotia	3.5	0.4	0.4
New Brunswick	1.7	0.2	0.2
Quebec	62.6	0.9	6.4
Ontario	592.5	5.3	61.5
Manitoba	14.1	1.3	1.4
Saskatchewan	4.2	0.4	0.4
Alberta	72.4	2.4	7.5
British Columbia	210.4	5.4	21.8
Yukon	0.2	0.7	0.0
Northwest Territories	0.2	0.5	0.0
Nunavut	0.0	0.1	0.0
Canada	**963.2**	**3.2**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Most live in Toronto or Vancouver

The majority of Canadians of South Asian origins live in Toronto or Vancouver. In 2001, over 500,000 people of South Asian origin lived in Toronto, while another 163,000 made Vancouver their home. That year, Canadians of South Asian origin made up 11% of Toronto's total population and 8% of Vancouver's residents. People of South Asian origin also made up 4% of residents of Calgary, 3% in both Edmonton and Ottawa, and 2% of Montreal's population.

A young population

Canadians of South Asian origin are somewhat more likely than the overall population to be children or young adults, while they are less likely to be seniors or approaching retirement age. In 2001, children under the age of 15 made up 25% of those who reported a South Asian origin, compared with 19% of the overall population. At the same time, 15% of South Asians were aged 15 to 24, versus 13% of the overall population. In contrast, seniors aged 65 and over made up only 6% of those who reported a South Asian origin, compared with 12% of all Canadians. Similarly, 20% of people of South Asian origin were aged 45 to 64, versus 24% of the overall population.

Table 3
Age distribution of the South Asian community and overall Canadian population, 2001

	South Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
			percentage			
Age group						
Under 15	25.7	24.4	25.0	20.2	18.6	19.4
15 to 24	15.3	15.7	15.4	14.0	13.0	13.4
25 to 44	33.0	34.4	33.7	30.4	30.6	30.5
45 to 64	20.3	19.2	19.8	24.4	24.4	24.4
65 and over	5.7	6.3	6.0	10.9	13.4	12.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Total population in thousands	**487.5**	**475.7**	**963.2**	**14,564.3**	**15,074.8**	**29,639.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Slightly more men than women

In contrast to the overall population, men make up a slight majority of Canadians of South Asian origin. In 2001, 50.6% of people of South Asian origin were male, compared with 49.1% of all Canadians. Like their counterparts in the overall population, though, women make up the majority of seniors of South Asian origin. In 2001, 51.8% of people aged 65 and over of South Asian origin were women, whereas women made up 56.1% of seniors in the overall population.

Diverse religious backgrounds

Canadians of South Asian origin are almost equally divided among the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim faith groups. In 2001, 28% of South Asians reported they were Sikh, 28% said they were Hindu, and 22% were Muslim. At the same time, another 16% reported that they were Christian. In contrast, relatively few people of South Asian origin have no religious affiliation. In 2001, just 4% said they had no religious affiliation, compared with 17% of the overall population.

Almost all can converse in an official language

Almost all Canadians of South Asian origin can carry on a conversation in at least one official language. [2] In 2001, 93% could conduct a conversation in one or both official languages, while 7% could not speak either English or French.

While most Canadians of South Asian origin can speak at least one official language, the majority have a mother tongue[3] other than English or French. In 2001, 65% of those who reported a South Asian origin said that their mother tongue was a non-official language. At the same time, 35% reported that their mother tongue was English and almost 1% reported that it was French. Among the non-official languages reported as mother tongue, the most common included Punjabi (29%), Tamil (10%), Urdu (9%), Gujurati (6%), Hindi (6%) and Bengali (3%).

A substantial number of Canadians of South Asian origin also speak a language other than English or French at home. In 2001, 46% said that they spoke only a non-official language in their home.

On the other hand, almost all Canadians of South Asian origin who are employed speak English or French most often on the job. Indeed, in 2001, only 1% of employed South Asians said they only spoke a non-official language at work, while another 2% regularly used a non-official language in combination with English or French.

Family status

Canadians of South Asian origin are considerably more likely than other Canadians to be married. In 2001, 61% of people aged 15 and over who reported a South Asian origin were married, compared with about 50% of all Canadian adults. In contrast, Canadians of South Asian origin are considerably less likely to live in a common-law relationship. In 2001, just 2% reported living common-law, compared with 10% of all Canadian adults.

Canadians of South Asian origin are also less likely than other Canadians to be lone parents. In 2001, 4% of adults of South Asian origin were lone parents, compared with 6% of adults in the overall population. In both the South Asian and Canadian populations, though, the large majority of lone parents are women. Among people who reported a South Asian origin women represented 80% of all lone parents, while the figure in the overall population was 81%.

Few live alone

Canadians of South Asian origin are less likely than other adults to live alone. In 2001, just 4% of South Asians aged 15 and over lived alone, compared with 13% of all adult Canadians. Seniors of South Asian origin are also relatively unlikely to live alone. That year, only 8% of seniors of South Asian origin aged 65 and over lived alone, compared with 29% of all seniors.

2. English and French are recognized as Canada's official languages in the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
3. A mother tongue is the language that a person learns first in childhood and that they still understand.

On the other hand, seniors of South Asian origin are more likely than other seniors to live with members of their extended family. In 2001, 25% of South Asians aged 65 and over lived with relatives such as the family of a son or daughter, while only 5% of all Canadian seniors lived with relatives.

Table 4
Family status of the South Asian community and overall population aged 15 and over, by sex, 2001

	South Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Married	61.1	60.8	61.0	51.0	48.3	49.6
Living common-law	1.7	1.7	1.7	10.0	9.4	9.7
Lone parent	1.5	6.2	3.8	2.1	8.7	5.5
Child living at home	23.9	20.3	22.1	19.0	14.0	16.4
Living with relatives	3.8	6.0	4.9	1.9	2.6	2.3
Living with non-relatives	3.7	1.6	2.7	4.7	3.3	4.0
Living alone	4.2	3.4	3.8	11.3	13.7	12.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Educational attainment

Canadian adults of South Asian origin are considerably more likely than the rest of the population to have a university degree. In 2001, 25% of Canadians of South Asian origin aged 15 and over had either a bachelor's or post-graduate degree, compared with 15% in the overall adult population. Canadians of South Asian origin are also almost twice as likely as those in the overall population to have a post-graduate degree. That year, 9% of South Asian adults had either a Master's degree or a Doctorate, compared with 5% of all Canadian adults.

As in the overall population, men of South Asian origin have somewhat more education than their female counterparts. For example, 28% of men of South Asian origin had a university degree in 2001, compared with 23% of women. However, women of South Asian origin are considerably more likely to have a university degree than women in the overall population.

Young people of South Asian origin are considerably more likely than other young Canadians to be attending school. In 2001, 72% of people of South Asian origin aged 15 to 24 were enrolled in a full-time educational program, compared with 57% of all Canadians in this age group. As well, among young people of South Asian origin, males are about as likely as females to be attending school. That year, 72% of men of South Asian origin aged 15 to 24 were enrolled in a full-time educational program, compared with 71% of their female counterparts. This contrasts with the overall population, in which young women are more likely than young men to be in school.

Table 5
Educational attainment of the South Asian community and overall Canadian population aged 15 and over, by sex, 2001

	South Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Less than high school	26.2	32.0	29.1	31.4	31.1	31.3
High school graduate	12.7	14.2	13.4	13.1	15.1	14.1
Some postsecondary	12.1	12.8	12.4	10.7	11.0	10.8
Trades certificate/diploma	7.7	4.7	6.2	14.1	7.8	10.9
College graduate	10.0	10.9	10.4	12.5	17.3	15.0
University certificate/diploma below bachelor's degree	3.2	2.8	3.0	2.1	2.9	2.5
Bachelor's degree	17.4	15.5	16.4	10.6	10.6	10.6
Post-graduate degree	10.6	7.1	8.9	5.4	4.2	4.8
Total with university degree	28.1	22.6	25.3	16.0	14.9	15.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Employment trends

Canadian adults of South Asian origin are about as likely as other Canadian adults to be employed. In 2001, 62% of adults of South Asian origin aged 15 and over were employed, the same figure as for all Canadian adults.

As with the overall population, South Asian men are more likely than their female counterparts to be employed outside the home. In 2001, 70% of adult men of South Asian origin aged 15 and over were part of the paid workforce, compared with 54% of adult women of South Asian origin. In fact, men of South Asian origin are also more likely to be employed than men in the overall population, whereas the opposite is true for women.

Table 6
Percentage of the population employed, by age group and sex, 2001

	South Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
	percentage					
Age group						
15 to 24	49.0	48.0	48.5	56.1	55.6	55.9
25 to 44	84.5	65.9	75.1	85.6	75.2	80.3
45 to 64	78.0	52.6	65.8	74.8	60.8	67.7
65 and over	16.9	5.2	10.9	13.0	4.8	8.4
Total	**70.3**	**53.7**	**62.0**	**67.2**	**56.1**	**61.5**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Unemployment

Labour force participants[4] of South Asian origin are more likely to be unemployed than labour force participants in the general population. In 2001, 9.5% of labour force participants of South Asian origin were unemployed, compared with 7.4% of those in the overall population.

As in the overall population, young people of South Asian origin are more likely to be unemployed than older adults. This is especially true for young men. In 2001, 16% of male labour force participants of South Asian origin aged 15 to 24 were unemployed, compared with 14% of all young Canadian males in this same category. At the same time, 15% of young female labour force participants of South Asian origin were unemployed, compared with 13% of their counterparts in the general population.

Incomes

Canadians of South Asian origin generally have lower incomes than the national average. In 2000,[5] the average income from all sources for Canadians of South Asian origin aged 15 and over was just under $26,000, compared with almost $30,000 for all Canadian adults.

As in the overall population, women of South Asian origin have lower incomes than their male counterparts. In 2000, the average income for adult women of South Asian origin aged 15 and over was under $20,000. This was almost $12,000 less than the average income for men of South Asian origin, for whom the figure was just over $31,000. However, the income gap between men and women of South Asian origin is the same as the income gap between their counterparts in the overall population. That year, the average income of women of South Asian origin was 62% that of their male counterparts, the same figure as in the overall population.

Canadian seniors of South Asian origin have relatively low incomes. In 2000, the average income from all sources for Canadians of South Asian origin aged 65 and over was $19,400. This was about $5,000 less than the average for all seniors, whose average income was $24,400. As with all seniors in Canada, female seniors of South Asian origin have lower incomes than their male counterparts. In 2000, the average income of women of South Asian origin aged 65 and over was just over $15,000, compared with almost $24,000 for senior men of South Asian origin.

Canadians of South Asian origin receive more of their income from earnings[6] than the overall population. In 2000, those who reported a South Asian origin said that 85% of their income came from earnings, compared with 77% for all Canadian adults. In contrast, Canadians of South Asian origin receive slightly less of their total income from government transfer payments than the overall population. In 2000, 10% of the income of Canadians of South Asian origin came from government transfers versus 12% of that of all Canadian adults.

4. Adults aged 15 and over who are employed, or who are unemployed and looking for work.

5. In the Census, people report their income for the previous year.

6. Includes wages and salaries and net income from self-employment.

Table 7
Average incomes of the South Asian community and overall Canadian population, by age group and sex, 2000

	South Asian community			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
			dollars			
Age group						
15 to 24	10,286	8,971	9,633	11,273	9,046	10,182
25 to 44	34,712	22,350	28,588	40,450	26,306	33,308
45 to 64	40,199	22,857	32,349	46,955	26,767	37,026
65 and over	23,970	15,012	19,391	3,078	19,461	24,437
Total	**31,396**	**19,511**	**25,629**	**36,865**	**22,885**	**29,769**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Incidence of low income

Canadians of South Asian origin are more likely than the overall population to have incomes that fall below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-offs. In 2000, the incomes of 23% of people who reported South Asian origin were below the low-income cut-offs, compared with 16% of the total Canadian population. As well, a relatively large proportion of children of South Asian origin live in low-income families. That year, 28% of children of South Asian origin under the age of 15 lived in families with incomes below the low-income cut-offs, compared with 19% of all children in Canada.

Unattached adults of South Asian origin are also very likely to have low incomes. In 2000, 49% of adults of South Asian origin who lived alone had low incomes, compared with 38% of their counterparts in the overall population.

Seniors of South Asian origin who live alone are particularly likely to have low incomes. In 2000, 63% of unattached seniors of South Asian origin aged 65 and over had incomes below the low-income cut-offs, compared with 40% of their counterparts in the overall population. As with the overall senior population, unattached female seniors of South Asian origin are the most likely to have low incomes. In 2000, 70% of unattached women of South Asian origin aged 65 and over had incomes below the low-income cut-offs, compared with 50% of unattached male seniors of South Asian origin and 43% of all Canadian unattached women aged 65 and over.

Most feel a sense of belonging to Canada

According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, a large majority of Canadians of South Asian origin feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada. In 2002, 88% of those who reported South Asian origin said they had a strong sense of belonging to Canada. At the same time, 67% said that they had a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group.

Canadians of South Asian origin are also active in Canadian society. In 2002, 70% of those who were eligible to vote reported doing so in the 2000 federal election, while 67% said they voted in the last provincial election. At the same time, about 40% reported that they had participated in an organization such as a sports team or community association in the 12 months preceding the survey.

At the same time, though, many Canadians of South Asian origin report they have experienced discrimination. Indeed, over one in three (35%) Canadians of South Asian origin reported that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnicity, race, religion, language or accent in the past five years, or since they arrived in Canada. A majority (74%) of those who had experienced discrimination said that they felt it was based on their race or skin colour, while 59% said that the discrimination had occurred in the workplace or when applying for a job.

Summary table

	People of South Asian origin			Total Canadian population		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Total population in thousands	**487.5**	**475.7**	**963.2**	**14,564.3**	**15,074.8**	**29,639.0**
Percentage change between 1996 and 2001	33.2	33.1	33.2	3.7	4.1	3.9
Percentage immigrant	67.1	68.6	67.9	18.0	18.7	18.4
Percentage with Canadian citizenship	75.1	73.4	74.3	94.9	94.5	94.7
Language						
Percentage able to speak English/French	95.2	91.1	93.1	98.8	98.2	98.4
Percentage speaking only non-official language at home	45.6	46.1	45.9	9.6	9.9	9.7
Age distribution						
Percentage aged less than 15	25.7	24.4	25.0	20.2	18.6	19.4
Percentage aged 25 to 44	33.0	34.4	33.7	30.4	30.6	30.5
Percentage aged 65 and over	5.7	6.3	6.0	10.9	13.4	12.2
Family status						
Percentage lone parents[1]	1.5	6.2	3.8	2.1	8.7	5.5
Percentage living alone[1]	4.2	3.4	3.8	11.3	13.7	12.5
Percentage seniors living alone	5.8	10.1	8.0	16.8	38.3	28.9
Education, employment and income						
Percentage with univeristy degree[1]	28.1	22.6	25.3	16.0	14.9	15.4
Percentage employed[1]	70.3	53.7	62.0	67.2	56.1	61.5
Unemployment rate	8.2	11.1	9.5	7.6	7.2	7.4
Percentage with low income	22.7	22.7	22.7	14.7	17.7	16.2

1. Include people aged 15 and over.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.